

A Dictionary of Bookplates of Irish Medical Doctors

A Dictionary of Bookplates of Irish Medical Doctors with short biographies: by Edward A. Martin MD. Dublin De Burca, 2003. ISBN 0-946130-39-8

Bookplates as a means of identifying a book's owner are almost as old as books themselves. They originated in Germany and the first English bookplate is probably that of Cardinal Wolsey of the early 16th century. Irish examples are later and that of Sir Thomas Molyneux MD (1661-1733) may well be the earliest.

This elegant volume by Edward A Martin, a well-known Dublin neurologist, lists some 170 bookplates of Irish doctors. Although the majority are of Dublin physicians, some 50 are from Northern Ireland, such as Dr Thomas Andrews and Dr Alexander Jaffray Nicholson (father of the Brigadier), of the nineteenth century, and Dr Hugh Calwell and Sir Ian Fraser of more recent times. Most bookplates are armorial and the Fraser plate is a good example of this, with its shield of arms, crest of serpent and rod over a stag's head, and the cross of the Order of St John behind. However, the contemplative study of books is seen in the Calwell plate and one of Dr John Stokes, while the more humorous side is in Dr John Denham's and the allegorical and gloomy side in the Bewley plate.

The biographical notes are a mine of information and must represent many years of work, covering the doctor and often his whole family, as well as the artist where this is known. They have an interest in their own right for their picture of medical education, history, and practise, particularly among the prosperous gentry of Dublin.

Finally, the production of the book by Eamon de Burca is exceptional, with high quality illustrations of nearly all the plates, and a good index and list of references. It is an ideal Christmas present for anyone with an interest in bibliography and/or medical history.

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